

Last week, because of the tie-in with the NYC trip, I chose what I felt like was the most mission-oriented Psalm in the whole book: Psalm 96.

But as I studied Psalm 96 last week, what I began to see was that Psalm 96 had a lot to say, not just about missions, but also about worship. From conversations with many of you this past week, and conversations with Rod, I decided (I trust God led me to this) that we need another sermon on worship.

And since Psalms is essentially the worship manual of the Christian Scriptures, it makes sense that we might spend a sermon and a half talking about it.

So, that brings us this morning to Psalm 95. Last week when I talked about worship we discussed it as something that occurs in all of life—work, home, church, etc. That is certainly true, but we are going to narrow that focus today.

Mainly because this Psalm narrows the focus. We are going to think about worship this morning mainly in reference to corporate worship— worship in church as the gathered people of God.

**Read Psalm 95.**

Pray.

**“Corporate Worship According to the Psalms”**

**1. The Corporate in Corporate Worship is Important**

Psalm 95 is all about corporate worship—verse 1, “Oh come, *let us* sing to the LORD.”

And it continues:

let us make a joyful noise....

2 Let us come into his presence....

let us make a joyful noise....

6 Oh come, let us worship and bow down;

let us kneel before the Lord, our Maker!

7 For he is our God,

and we are the people of his pasture....

This is not a single leader standing before the congregation making an appeal.

This is “intra-congregational encouragement.”

Here are the ESV Study Bible notes: “The members of the congregation singing these verses *invite one another* to the great privilege of worshipping the Lord, the great God, the great King above all gods.”

And Derek Kidner: “Like most of the verbs of this psalm, [the full-throated cries] are urged upon us as worshippers, *indeed we address one another, to make sure that we rise to the occasion*, not drifting into His courts preoccupied and apathetic.”

In 1 Corinthians 14...the worship manual of the NT....Paul instructs the members of the congregation in verse 26 that EVERY thing they do in corporate worship (including singing) should be done in order to build others up.

This is what **Colossians 3.16** has in view when it says, “teaching *and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs.*”

So, I believe it would please the Lord, if every time you enter a time of corporate worship, you enter with a view toward how you can build up others during that time.

Maybe in our individualistic culture this does not go over very easy. It is nevertheless an important reality.

From your posture during the sermon; to the look in your eyes; to your volume in singing; your expressiveness; your friendliness (or lack of it) during the greeting time. All of those things have the ability to either deflate others, or build them up.

In an individualistic culture, we bristle at the thought of having any responsibility for someone else's response to me

- Be friendly during the greeting time, even if you don't like the fact that we have a greeting time.
- Sing heartily in every song, even if it is not your favorite.

Building others up is more important than your preferences.

"How well" a service goes on Sunday is not just dependent on the quality of the sermon (though important); or the quality of the worship team (though it matters)....it also depends on whether the congregation shows up ready to worship. Whether or not you sing out. Whether or not you are engaging or indifferent.

You are a worshipper in a corporate context. And the way that you worship contributes or takes away from the good of that congregation of people.

And so the worshippers in Psalm 95 are urging one another on: Let's make a joyful noise together....let's sing together....let's kneel and bow down to our great God...

You can be or seem listless and indifferent...apathetic...and lacking passion ...and that has an effect in the congregational setting. It deflates and discourages others.

Or you can be joyful and reverent...interested and engaged....and that has an effect in the congregational setting. It builds others up.

**\*iii.\*** Asking the teens to move up a few rows....an individualistically minded teen is probably going to bristle at such a request. A teen that cares about edify the rest of the body will be open.

May all of us, teens, kids and adults, conscientiously seek to build others up during corporate worship.

## **2. Corporate Worship Advertises the Greatness of God**

Corporate Worship is meant to show forth the greatness of God. If there is never another corporate worship service held in the history of the world, God will be just as glorious as he is at this moment.

But he will not be advertised as such in the way that he is when we worship Him as we ought.

**\*iii.\*** God is not above this. He is not above creating an ad campaign. Our corporate worship in the local church is His marketing strategy. Blood-bought, Spirit-filled, Bible-Saturated advertisement of his prevailing excellence.

We believe that God is supremely great and glorious, and therefore to know him and have fellowship with him is the only source of supreme JOY.

Psalm 95 says—and watch the logic of heaven here—

2b--let us make a joyful noise to him with songs of praise!  
[3] For the LORD is a great God,  
and a great King above all gods.

Don't miss this word "for" here—"Let us make a joyful noise to him with songs of praise"—that's our commitment to be joyful in corporate worship—"For the LORD is a great God, and a great King above all gods"—above all! In other words: Rejoice in God because God is a great King. The character of God is the ground of our joyful singing.

And because of that, we also believe our joyful singing advertises God's excellence. His greatness is the basis of our joyful noise; our joyful noise is the evidence of his greatness.

If that sounds like John Piper helped me to articulate, you are correct.

Now....what does this mean for our corporate worship. It means that our worship should be a joyful, reverent advertisement of God's prevailing excellence.

That means that this:

**\*ill.\*** "Crown him with many crowns, the Lamb upon his throne; awake my soul and sing [AWAKE?!]" (apathetically sung) does not show God off for who He is. No matter the condition of your heart at that moment....your posture.....your face.....your listless expression.....lies about God.

That leads us to point #3.....

### 3. On Expressiveness in Corporate Worship

I now wade into the portion of this sermon that is the most fraught with danger. The analogy to talking about expressiveness in worship would be preaching on tithing, and as you enter the building, the treasurer is taping signs to your back that have the amount you gave last year written on them.

Expressiveness in worship (or the lack of it) is there for all to behold. So, its sensitive.

Even now join me in praying that what is said here would build us up, and not divide us.

Please look at the text. We see expressive worship commended at least 5 times in Psalm 95:

Verse 1—"let us sing to the Lord"

Verse 1b—"let us make a joyful noise" (in the NIV—"shout aloud" and in the NAS "shout joyfully")

Verse 2—"let us make a joyful noise" (again again NIV and NAS....shout!)

Verse 6 (2x)—" Oh come, let us worship and *bow down*; *let us kneel* before the LORD, our Maker!"

In addition to shouting and joyful singing and bowing and kneeling various places in the Psalms instruct us about other forms of physical and instrumental expression in worship. Here is a sampling:

**Psalm 47.1**, "Clap your hands, all peoples!"

Psalm 134.2, "Lift up your hands to the holy place and bless the Lord!"

Psalm 22.23, "All you offspring of Jacob, glorify him, and stand in awe of him, all you offspring of Israel!"

Psalm 150.3-6, "[3] Praise him with trumpet sound; praise him with lute and harp! [4] Praise him with tambourine and dance; praise him with strings and pipe! [5] Praise him with sounding cymbals; praise him with loud clashing cymbals! [6] Let everything that has breath praise the LORD! Praise the LORD!"

I love Psalm 108.1, "My heart is steadfast, O God! I will sing and make melody with all my being!"

And these expressions are meant to convey a wide range of emotions and attitudes:

--Shouting and Loud Crashing Cymbals no doubt convey joy and exuberance in the Lord's work.

--Kneeling and Bowing Down portray reverence and awe.

--Strings and Pipes and the flute can be played in such a way as to communicate sorrow and grief.

All of these expressions of worship can honor God when done out of the overflow of a heart that is grateful to God for his grace.

On the other hand, physical expressiveness is no guarantee that genuine worship is taking place. And a lack of physical expression does not mean a person is not devoted to God, or does not love God.

- Sometimes sincere people who love God have never been taught that physical expressions in worship can honor God.
- Sometimes sincere people who want to express a heart-felt desire to worship God with their bodies are sinfully inhibited by fear of man, or by some desire to be seen as a "respectable" Christian.

- And then there are times when people who are very expressive in a worship context do it for show.
- Or an expressive person might be living a life that does not honor God, and rather than being honored by their expressions, God is angry at them. More than once in the OT, God condemns the worship of his people when they are living in unrepentant sin.
- It surely is the case that there are people in our congregation every week who want to worship God in spirit and truth, and yet because of some grief in their life, or because of some crisis of faith they are experiencing, just being here in the corporate worship service is an act of faith for them.

Notice carefully that the invitation to physical expressions in worship in Psalm 95 are BASED on and IN LIGHT of the character of God.

Verse 2-3: joyful noise FOR....

Verse 6-7: bow and kneel FOR.....

This is so important. Because things other than the character of God can evoke physical responses in a time of worship. The beat or melody of a song can have that effect. Maybe a good hook does it. Maybe it's a response more determined by the crowd around us.

**\*ill.\*** You might notice that people at a Tim McGraw concert get pretty expressive. While our expressions may look similar on the outside, they should be motivated by something entirely different than "Don't Take the Girl."

So, you are not ever going to hear us saying, "Alright, Clap those hands, let's dance!" We are not going to say, "bow..."

What you are going to see us doing instead is consistently parading the gospel in front of you. You have been rescued from your sin by the King and Creator of the World. The only Sovereign, all wise God has made you his own. Jesus substituted himself in your place. He took your punishment.

If that is not enough to evoke heart felt physical expressions in worship, than nothing will be.

So, our emotions and physical responses in worship should come primarily from the truths we are hearing and singing. Melodies and catchy hooks can affect us in a God-glorifying way. The response of those around us in worship can be rightfully edifying. But the primary thing that ought to move us to worship God is truth about God.

Let me address this from one other angle. What if, because of some sort of suffering, or some sort of unexplained indifference, you are not "feeling" it on a certain Sunday. I think that David models for us in the Psalms that even then kneeling or raising a hand to God or bowing our heads in prayer is an expression of desperation for God to move in us so that these great truths do bring about joy and reverence in us.

Let me be forthright.....I hope you understand that I have nothing to gain in this sermon other than obedience to the Bible myself and love for your progress in the faith. Rod (our Sr. Pastor, who for the guests, is more expressive than some in the church) has not put me up to this.

If the descriptions of corporate worship in the book of Psalms are indicative of what pleases God in corporate worship (I believe they are), than on the whole, as a church, we fall short. And over the years, I have been offender #1 in this category. There are so many evidences of grace and progress in our church. I am encouraged about where we are. But, I think this is an area of where we fall short.

\*now, just parenthetically if you think what is described in the Psalms is somehow isolated to one particular culture, I would urge you to consider that Revelation seems to describe the worship in heaven in VERY similar ways. And even the worship of angels before the world was created is Psalm-esque.

Does that mean that I think you are sinning if you don't raise your hands or kneel in worship? No, not necessarily. If I answered yes, I think you'd have to also say that it would be sin to not have a lyre or a harp in our worship gatherings.

That said, I do believe we have room to grow, and I do believe that an increase in physical expressiveness is part of that.

I think what the Psalms are after is a people for God, wrecked by the character and work of God, who want God to be glorified in their response to Him. And while that starts in the heart, it should show in our bodies and on our face. It should be heard in our voices. So that God is glorified. So that saints are edified. And so that unbelievers can tell that we love this God very much.

How I worship is not a matter of my self expression. I think that's what I've always assumed about people I've observed who are enthusiastic in worship—that is just who THEY are...they are just expressing THEMSELVES.

But it is not that. The logic, over and over again in Psalms, is that we worship in response to the greatness of God, and in order to display the greatness of God.

While I don't believe there is a law about which physical expressions must be present in order to achieve this, it is not rocket science.

**\*ill.\*** If you ever have the distinct privilege of going to an Arkansas Razorback home football game, one of the things they will do there is "call the hogs." You get 70-80,000 people doing any cheer, its gonna be fun. Anyway, calling the hogs is a very expressive cheer.....

now, let's just say that you are at a hog game, and you are into it, and you are calling the hogs with those other 70k worshippers...er, fans. But then you notice, and this definitely happens....you notice that the guys 2 rows down is not even standing up....he's not even looking up...and maybe you start to wonder, "is he an Auburn fan? Is he rooting for the Crimson Tide?" But then you notice that he's got his program out, and he's going through that thing....and then you notice that he's got ear phones on with one of those nerdy antennas sticking out of it. And you realize....oh that guy is listening to the broadcast on the radio....he's keeping a box score. And what dawns on you is that that guy is just as into the hogs as you are.....but his expression is quite a bit different. And in its own way that honors God.

I think there is an analogy there to worship. People's expressions will be different, and still God honoring.

And yet, let's be real. If some other guy is over there with a blank stare on his face, and going woo, pig, lamely, while sitting down....you're going to know that he's not into it at the heart level.

**\*ill.\*** I remember being at a conference one time, and for a few minutes watching a guy worship. And he never raised his hands. He never bowed down. But man, I could tell that this guy loved God with all his heart. His expressions honored and glorified God. He had taut muscles, clinched fists and was just belting it out the whole time.

The Bible's descriptions of expression in worship are not prescriptive. But let's be honest and say that, "yes, corporate worship is intended to display that God is great. And no, listless, mumbling, disengaged stoic singing does not bring Him honor. Expressions in worship that flow from a heart of worship....do bring him glory....and whether people that see it understand it or not, they can look on, and say....*that person sure seems to care about the things he's singing.*"

I have to tell you, I've been torn up about this issue for a couple of years. Almost every time I sing with you all I think about it. And for a couple of years I've known that my worship of God did not honor God in the way that it could. And I knew the reason I was not more free in worship was because I was sinfully concerned about what those around me would think.

Now, in saying that I've been wrestling with this for a couple of years---I have tons and tons of patience toward those who feel defensive and frustrated at any part of today's sermon.

But let me just share, transparently, the realities that God brought to bear in my mind, in terms of giving physical expression to how I am inwardly effected Sunday after Sunday when we sing these great truths together.

There are a few:

1. Kristy

2. My kids. Now, I don't think my kids are born-again yet. Maybe CJ, but certainly not the other two. And yet, in their own childish way, they are naturally expressive when they sing to the LORD. And so I came to dread modeling the fear of man in front of them Sunday after Sunday. God made them as whole people—minds to think, hearts to feel, bodies to express. I fear that the example of their daddy would spoil that.

3. Same with you. I am afraid that I have at least in a small way (maybe a big way....i actually have no idea) contributed to our congregational coolness in worship.

4. Last, I want everything in my life to be able to glorify God. I want it to advertise God's greatness. And so in worship the last thing I want is to be perceived as indifferent about the gospel. I am not...and that is the story I want to communicate in how I worship.

#### **4. God Affects Every Part of Us**

Consider what is happening in this Psalm.

- Truth about God is being put forward—He is a great King; the Creator of all; the Shepherd of his people. That addresses the thinking part of our person. Our mind.
- These truths, then produce certain emotions in us—joy, thanksgiving, reverence. That is the feeling part of our person. Our heart.
- When this truth comes to effect our emotions, it bends our will. That is the end of the Psalm where obedience is called for in contrast to God's people under Moses.

So, worship addresses every part of us—mind, heart, will.

If all you are is a thinker to the neglect of heart and will, you'll be knowledgeable, but cold. And maybe a hypocrite.

If all you are is a feeler to the neglect of mind and will, you'll just come on Sundays to lay on your therapy couch, and expect God (and the preacher and worship team) to help you feel better.

If all you are is a doer to the neglect of mind and heart, you'll be a legalist. All you will hear in the sermons is things to do; things for other to do.

Churches build their entire identities around 1 of those parts of the human person, and neglect the other two. Let's be a congregation full of people who worships God, as David says in Psalm 108, "with all of our being!"

So that when these rival small-g gods come calling for our attention we say ala verse 3, "The Lord is a great God, and a great King above all gods."

Corporate worship is designed to bring you back to what is real. To remind you of the truths you've known; cause you to be freshly affected by them at the heart level, and then set you on a mission to live urgently in response to God.

May it be so among us this week.